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ABSTRACT

Because of a recognition that the requirements of employees and the work values held by young people have been changing, a study was conducted to determine the meaning associated with work among high school consumer and homemaking home economics students. The effect of two independent variables, grade level and grade point average (GPA), was studied. Data were gathered from 230 students in grades 7-12, with an average age of 17; 40 percent were from rural schools and 60 percent attended urban schools. The survey was conducted through classroom administration of Part I of the Meaning and Value of Work scale developed by Kazanas (1975) and demographic information measures. Results following analysis of variance showed no significant main effects were revealed, although three main effects were revealed on three subscales. The study found that students with GPAs of B or below had a more global orientation than those with A averages. The study also found that students in 12th grade viewed work as less status oriented than students from the other high school grade levels. Students viewed work as more dependent upon society's expectations in earlier grades, and students with A averages viewed work as less dependent upon society's expectations. Further research taking into account more variables was suggested, along with increased career education. (15 references) (KC)

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THE MEANING OF WORK: A HIGH SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE

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Running Head: The Meaning of Work

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The Meaning of Work: A High School Perspective

Philosophically, the concept of work has been debated through the centuries. The notion of what constitutes or defines good work did not begin with the automation and technology age of the modern man, although "the issue of good work is of primary importance in the preparation of those who are being prepared for participation in the labor force . . ." (Bjorquist, 1991, p. 33). ". . . Some form of work always seems to have occupied a major portion of the lives of adults . . ." (Bjorquist, 1991, p. 34). The concept of work was addressed even in some of the earliest writings, such as Greek mythology. Good work was praised by the Christian community (Kaiser, 1966); nevertheless, the correlation between good work described during earlier periods and that of today is not clear. Automation of the industrial revolution reduced the need for semi- and unskilled labor, revolutionizing the work force of the twentieth century. Industry workers knew little about the industrial system that employed them (Cornfield, 1987; Kliebard, 1990), many times making jobs monotonous and not fulfilling.

Along with the need for training and/or retraining workers that followed the mechanical (and technological) explosion during the first half of this century, a need also appeared to more fully discern employee attitudes toward work. As expected, the results of research conducted by Emery and Thorsrud (1976) indicated that certain characteristics of work were considered more favorable than others. For example,

1. Work should have a desirable future.

2. Employees are not in competition with one another, thereby fostering a sense of help and respect of co-workers.

3. Workers feels they are making a worthwhile contribution to society.

In a similar study conducted in the United States and Sweden (Karasek and Theorell, 1990), jobs that offered opportunity for human development, some voice in the requirements of the jobs, a challenge and a sense of pride were considered good. These findings reflected those reported in a study of values conducted by Yankelovich, Zetterberg, Strumpel, and Shanks (1983). Individuals tended to value inner feelings of success rather than outward signs such as wealth, more individual autonomy, increased freedom for leisure, and stronger connections with community (Yankelovich, et al, 1983).

Unlike their forefathers, young men and women entering the work force today are encountering more demanding basic skills. According to Busse (1991), employers are requiring that their entry-level employees be proficient not only in the technical skills required by the job, but that these individuals should have confidence in themselves, a supply of new ideas and exhibit good manners (Busse, 1991; Martinez, 1991). In addition, they should be ". . . team players, effective communicators, good listeners, quick thinkers, and willing learners" (Busse, 1991, p. 24).

More basic academic skills such as ". . . math, science and communications skills . . ., [and] problem-solving [and] . . . decision-making skills. . ." (p. 24), as well as the application of these, are required of new employees (Pritz, 1988). Moreover, other factors

enter the picture of today's work place, thereby impacting attitudes held by today's work force (Pritz, 1988):

1. World-wide competition in the market place has increased; therefore, workers have to be more productive.

2. The move from a producer of goods to a provider of information and services has resulted in the elimination of jobs ". . . requiring few or no basic skills . . ." p. 24).

3. Today's " . . . jobs change [along] with technology and . . . require flexibility and adaptation . . ." (p. 24)

In view of the continuous changing demands in the current job market and a change in today's youth who are entering the work force of the 1990s, the question becomes: What does work mean to students? Research attempts during the past two decades has explored relationships between the meaning of work, the value of work, personality traits, and occupational awareness. Results have been minimal at best. For example, in a study conducted by McGough and Kazanas (1979) that compared the factors of meaning and value of work and self-concept of non-disadvantaged and disadvantaged juniors in an urban high school, no significant differences were apparent between in the perceptions of work held by non-disadvantaged and disadvantaged students. However, perceptions of work held be females were consistently higher than those held by males.

Similar findings were reported by Kazanas and Morrison (1977) in a study designed to compare personality traits and factors associated with the meaning and value of work. The population for this study was technical associate of science degree students and transfer

associate of arts degree students in their last semester at a community state junior college. Although no significant factors were found for each of the factors in the meaning of work sub-scale, the factor with the highest mean score was Philosophical Orientation followed by Experience with Satisfaction/Status and Productivity having the lowest mean scores (Kazanas and Morrison, 1977).

More recently Kazanas and Kraska (1981) examined the meaning and value of work an occupational awareness of high school seniors. In this study, a comparison was made between perceptions of work held by vocational and non-vocational students; no significant differences existed in the two groups surveys (Kazanas and Kraska, 1981).

Need for the Study

Understanding students' perceptions toward work, particularly students in vocational education, is important when helping them make the transition from school to work, which is probably the single most important task facing vocational educators today. Young employees, i.e., those who are initially entering the work force in entry-level positions, are very different from their counterparts of the past. Today's generation of workers are more knowledgeable about what they can reasonably expect in the work place. For example, they have definite expectations about " . . . the quality of work life, [and] employees' rights and working conditions . . ." (Alvarez, 1992, 35). These individuals also tend to be brighter and more vocal, expecting those in leadership positions to be sincere and treat them with respect (Alvarez, 1992). Therefore, the overall purpose of this study was to determine the meaning associated with work among high school consumer and homemaking home

economics students. Specifically, this study was to determine the effect of two independent variables, Grade Level and GPA, on the meaning of work among this population.

Methodology

Sample

A total of 230 vocational consumer and homemaking home economics students participated in this study. Of these, 93 (40%) were from rural schools and the remaining 137 (60%) were attending urban schools. Fifty-eight percent (n=133) were involved in some extracurricular activity with only 16 percent (n=37) belonging to FHA.

Students were enrolled in grades 7 through 12, and their ages ranged from 11 to 19 with the average age being 17. Over 61% (n=140) of these students reported having a grade point average of a B or better (Table 1). The two most often identified learning styles were Abstract Random (n=92; 40%) and Concrete Sequential (n= 71; 31%).

Insert Table 1 about here

Instrumentation

The research instrument used in this study was the Meaning and Value of Work Scale (MVWS), developed by Kazanas (1975) as a measure of the meaning and value that people associate with their work. The overall instrument is divided into two major scales: Meaning of Work and Value of Work. However, for the purpose of this study, only Part I of the MVWS, Meaning of Work was utilized. This scale consists of 40 items which are further

divided into seven sub-scales: Experience, Philosophical Orientation, Societal Orientation, Opportunity, Status, Activity, and Productivity. These sub-scales represent the various components of the meaning associated with work.

Included for each item was a five-point Likert-type scale: SA= strongly agree, A=agree, U=uncertain, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree. A high score was indicative of a broader perception.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha of internal consistency of these scales was used. The overall reliability for the Meaning of Work scale was estimated at .89 with the reliabilities of the seven sub-scales ranging from .54 to .76. The overall reliability for the Meaning of Work scale is consistent with that reported in two separate studies by Kazanas and Gregor (1977) and McGough and Kazanas (1979). In both studies, reliability was reported at .89. The reliability estimates of this study are summarized along with the scale means and standard deviations in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Content validity of the MVWS was established when the instrument was initially developed. This is reported in the literature (Kazanas, 1975).

Demographic information regarding students' grade, age, GPA, type of school setting (rural, urban) learning style, and participation in extracurricular activities or FHA

membership was also gathered at this time. The demographic questions consisted of eight forced field items.

Data Collection

Seven consumer and homemaking home economics classes in one state were randomly selected for this study. Each student was administered the Meaning and Value of Work Scale during one typical class period, approximately 55 minutes. Directions describing how to answer the questions were read to the entire class by their regular teacher. As students finished, they turned in the completed instruments to their home economics teacher.

Analysis of Data

The primary data analysis was analysis of variance (ANOVA). A 4 X 3 factorial design was implemented to determine the effects of grade level and GPA of the dependent variables of Meaning of Work. Separate 4 X 3 ANOVAs were also performed for each of the seven Meaning of Work sub-scales. Post-hoc multiple comparisons (Tukey tests) were performed to further explain significant main effects.

Results

The results from the 4 X 3 ANOVAs are summarized in Table 3. No significant main effects were revealed for the overall scale of Meaning of Work, although three main effects were revealed when the specific subscales were examined. These main effects were for the subscales of Philosophical Orientation, Status, and Societal Orientation.

Insert Table 3 about here

There was a main effect for the variable of GPA on the Philosophical Orientation scale ($F(2,184) = 3.84$). Specifically, those students with lower GPAs (B or below) had a more global orientation than those with higher GPAs (A). Another main effect for the variable of grade was found on the Status subscale ($F(3,190) = 3.31$). A comparison of groups revealed that students in 12th grade viewed work as less status oriented than students from the other three high school grade levels. Follow-up Tukey tests revealed a significant pairwise difference was found between grades 12 and 9.

Lastly, a significant interaction was found between grade and GPA on the subscale of Societal Orientation [$F(6,184) = 2.52$]. Follow-up comparisons revealed some interesting patterns in regard to this scale. Generally, students viewed work as more dependent upon society's expectations in earlier grades. The view of work within grades 10 and 11 was much more dependent upon students' GPA. Specifically, grade 11 students with high GPAs (A) differed significantly than those with GPA's of B or below. Students with GPA's of an A viewed work as less dependent upon society's expectations.

Discussion

The scores from each of the seven subscales were consistently low indicating a somewhat narrow perception of the meaning of work among high school home economics

students. This may be partially due to the homogeneous sample of students. These students were all enrolled in home economics programs. Students in similar vocational programs should be expected to view various aspects of work consistently. These views however, may be further clarified depending upon a student's academic standing and grade level.

The current study revealed some influence of the students' GPA and grade level. For the sub-scale Philosophical Orientation, there was a main effect for GPA. Students with a GPA of an A had more defined philosophical orientations than those students with GPA's of B or below. Students with lower GPA's (B or below) viewed work more in terms of a necessary task performed for money in order to meet financial needs whereas students than did those students with GPA's of A.

Another finding suggests that students gradually view work as less status-oriented as they progress through high school.

The main effect for grade level, on the subscale of Status, although revealed that students in the higher grade levels, hence older students, had lower orientation toward work as a symbol of status. The most dramatic drop in students' perceptions toward work as a way of achieving a position in life occurred between grades 11 and 12. As students matured and began to make career decisions, they began to value other aspects of work, placing job status lower on their list of desirable job characteristics.

A significant interaction between the variables Grade Level and GPA was also found on the sub-scale, Societal Orientation. This interaction suggests that students in lower grades general viewed work as more dependent upon society's expectations than students in upper

grade levels and students with the lowest GPAs , i.e., a GPA of C or below, placed somewhat more value on society's expectations. Eleventh grade, however, appears to be a critical grade. Eleventh grade students reported the most interesting results. Students' views of work were most dependent

upon society's expectations when they had a lower GPA (C or below). These views gradually became less dependent upon society as students GPA increased. Once again, it appears that eleventh grade is a very critical time for students to make career decisions and these decisions are somewhat dependent upon their GPA.

Conclusions and Implications

Caution should be noted as the results of this preliminary study are interpreted. The results reported here not conclusive and, therefore, should not be generalized to populations other than those possibly enrolled in Consumer and Homemaking classes. Experience and research show that ultimately work plays an important role in the lives of most. For the population studied, however, factors other than those measured by the seven sub-scales of the MVWWS must account for what high school home economics students perceive as worthwhile in terms of the meaning of work.

Since this study focused on variables (characteristics) related to the individual and the Consumer and Homemaking home economics program, other variables such as ethic background, family structure, and parental occupation(s) were not examined. No significant differences were observed with respect to variables other than Grade Level and GPA. This evidence suggests that the home economics curriculum may need to be changed to include

more conceptualization about the important contribution that work makes shaping both family and community life, as well as the function of work in satisfying individual goals and desires.

If a follow-up study should be undertaken, consideration should be given to:

1. Redefining the list of variables enabling researchers to examine others that would perhaps better explain student perceptions of work. Also, include a random sampling of subjects from each area of vocational education.

2. Using a pre-post measure experimental research design. The treatment would consist of teaching a module on career exploration and employability skills.

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Table 1

Demographic Composition

Variable	N	Percent
Grade		
7	2	.9
8	2	.9
9	30	13.0
10	37	16.1
11	56	24.3
12	103	44.8
Grade Point Average		
A	31	13.5
B	109	47.4
C	83	36.1
D	5	2.2
F	2	.9

Table 2

Summary of Reliabilities for Meaning of Work Scales

Scale	N	Mean	SD	Item	Alpha
Meaning of Work					
Experience	207	12.95	3.83	6	.76
Philosophical Orientation	205	16.85	5.59	8	.75
Societal Orientation	210	9.40	2.88	5	.65
Opportunity	206	15.21	4.19	7	.75
Status	210	10.54	2.86	5	.62
Activity	206	14.16	3.38	6	.65
Productivity	227	5.51	1.79	3	.54
Total Meaning Scale	192	84.20	16.86	40	.89

Table 3

Summary of 4 X 3 ANOVAs for Meaning of Work

Scale	Grade (A)	GPA (B)	A X B	Within
Meaning of Work Sub-scales:				
Experience				
Mean Square	14.09	3.92	24.78	14.95
F Ratio	.94	.26	1.66	
Philosophical Orientation				
Mean Square	43.81	113.91	14.99	29.68
F Ratio	1.48	3.84*	.51	
Societal Orientation				
Mean Square	10.83	14.69	8.75	7.44
F Ratio	1.46	1.98	2.52*	
Opportunity				
Mean Square	28.51	27.97	19.82	16.63
F Ratio	1.71	1.68	1.19	
Status				
Mean Square	25.47	14.01	12.34	7.69
F Ratio	3.31*	1.82		1.61

Table 3 continued

Table 3

Summary of 4 X 3 ANOVAs for Meaning of Work

Scale	Grade (A)	GPA (B)	A X B	Within
Activity				
Mean Square	10.92	.30	14.15	11.48
F Ratio	.95	.03	1.23	
Productivity				
Mean Square	.07	3.40	3.55	3.07
F Ratio	.02	1.11	1.16	

* $p < .05$